

# SATAN SANDERSON

By HALLIE ERMINIE RIVES

## CHAPTER VIII.

"Am I My Brother's Keeper?"

At the foot of the landing he paused, drawing a deep breath as if to lift a weight of air. He needed to get his bearings—to win back a measure of calmness.

As he stood there, Hugh came from the library. His head was down and he went furtively and slinkingly, as though dreading even a casual regard. He snatched his hat from the rack, passed out of the house and was swallowed up in the dusk. David Stires had followed his son into the hall. He answered the gloomy question in Harry's eyes.

"He is gone," he said, "and I hope to heaven I may never see his face again!" Then, slowly and feebly, he ascended the stair.

The library windows were shadowed by shrubbery and the sunset spluttered against the wall in a broad stripe, like cloth of crimson silk. Harry leaned his forehead against the chill marble of the mantelpiece and gazed frowningly at the dark, gleaming clock—an antique of his own to David Stires—where the slip of paper still lay that spelled such ruin and shame. From the rear of the house came the pert, titling laugh of a maid bantering an express man, and the heavy, rattling thump of rolled trunks. There was something ghastly in the incomprehension of all the house save the four chief actors of the melodrama. The tragedy was over, the curtain rung down to clapping of hands, the scene-shifters clearing away—and behind all, in the wings, unseen by any spectator, the last act of a living tragedy was rushing to completion.

Ten, fifteen minutes passed, and old David Stires re-entered the room, went feebly to his wheel-chair and sat down. He sat a moment in silence, looking at a portrait of Jessica—a painting by Ailsaether that hung above the mantel—in a light, fleecy gown, with one white rose in the bronze hair. When he spoke the body's infirmity had become all at once pitifully apparent. The fiery wrath seemed suddenly to have burned itself out, leaving only dead ashes behind. His eyes had shrunk away into almost empty sockets. The authority had faded from his face. He was all at once a feeble, gentle-looking, old man, with white mustaches and uncertain hands, dressed in ceremonial broadcloth.

"I have told you," he said presently, in a broken voice, "you are kind, Sanderson, very kind, God bless you!"

"What has God to do with it?" he fell a voice behind him. Harry faced about. It was Jessica, as he had first seen her in the upper room, with the bandages around her eyes.

"What has God to do with it?" he repeated, in a hard tone. "Perhaps Mr. Sanderson can tell us. It is in his line."

"Please—" said Harry.

He could not have told what he would have asked, though the accent was almost one of entreaty. The harsh satire touched his sacred calling; coming from her lips it affronted at once his religious instinct and his awakened love. It was all he said, for he stopped suddenly at sight of her face, pale, frosty, white as the folded cloth.

"Oh," she said, turning toward the voice, "I remember what you said that last night, right here in this very room—that you sowed your wild oats at college with Hugh—that they were 'a tidy crop!' You were strong, and he was weak. You led him and he followed. You were 'Satan Sanderson,' Abbot of the Saints, the set in which he learned gambling. Why, it was in your rooms that he played his first game of poker—he told me so himself! And now he has

gone to be an outcast, and you stand in the pulpit in a cassock, you, the Reverend 'Harry Sanderson!' You helped to make him what he has become! Can you undo it?"

Harry was looking at her with a stricken countenance. He had no answer ready. The wave of confusion that had submerged him when he had restored the bandage to her eyes had again welled over him. He stood shocked and confounded. His hand fumbled at his lapel, and the white carnation, crushed by his fingers, dropped at his feet.

"I am not excusing Hugh now," she went on wildly. "He has gone beyond excuse or forgiveness. He is as dead to me as though I had never known him, though the word you spoke an hour ago made me his wife. I shall have that to remember all my life—that, and the one moment I had waited for so long, for my first sight of his face and my bride's kiss. I met carry it with me always. I can never wipe that face from my brain, or the sting of that kiss from my lips—the kiss of a forger—of my husband."

The old man groaned. "I didn't know he had seen her!" he said helplessly. "Jessica, Hugh's sin is not Sanderson's fault!"

In her bitter words was an injustice as passionate as her pain, but for her life she could not help it. She was a woman wrenched and torn, tortured beyond control, numb with anguish. Every quivering tendril of feeling was a live protest, every voice of her soul was crying out against the fact. In those dreadful minutes when her mind took in the full extent of her calamity, Hugh's past intimacy and present grim contrast with Harry Sanderson had mercilessly thrust themselves upon her, and her agony had seared the swift anthesis on her brain.

To Harry Sanderson, however, her words fell with a wholly disproportionate violence. It had never occurred to him that he himself had been individually and actively the cause of Hugh's downfall. The accusation pierced through the armor of self-esteem that he had linked and riveted with habit. The same pain of mind that had spurred him, on that long-ago night, to the admission she had heard, had started to new life a bare, a seething, a revolting sin.

"It is all true," he said. It was the inevitable voice of conscience that spoke. "I have been deceiving myself. I was my brother's keeper. I see it now."

She did not catch the deep compunction in the judicial utterance. In her agony the very composure and restraint that he had linked and riveted with habit, she had linked and riveted with habit. The same pain of mind that had spurred him, on that long-ago night, to the admission she had heard, had started to new life a bare, a seething, a revolting sin.

White and breathless, Jessica climbed the stair. In her room, she took a key from a drawer and ran swiftly to the attic-study. She unlocked the door with hurried fingers, tore the wrappings from the tall white figure of the prodigal son, and found a heavy mallet. She lifted this with all her strength, and showered blow upon blow upon the hard clay, her face and hair and shimmering train powdered with the white dust, till the statue lay on the floor, a heap of tumbled fragments.

Patrol and passionate as the scene in the library had been, her going left a pall of silence in the room. Harry Sanderson looked at David Stires with pale intensity.

"Yet I would have given my life," he said in a low voice, "to save her this!"

Something in the tone caught the old man. He glanced up.

"I never guessed!" he said slowly.

"I never guessed that you loved her, too."

But Harry had not heard. He did not even know that he had spoken aloud. David Stires turned his wheel chair to the Korean desk, touching the bell as he did so. He took up the draft and put it into his pocket. He pressed a panel, and a door opened, disclosing a hidden door leading to a room with a crackling parchment. It was the will against whose signing Harry had pleaded months before in that same room. The matter rested.

"Witness my signature, Blake," he said, and wrote his name on the last page. "Mr. Sanderson will sign with you."

An hour later the fast express that bore Jessica and David Stires was shrieking across the long skeleton railroad bridge, a dotted trail of fire against the deepening night. The sound crossed the still miles, it called to Harry Sanderson, where he sat in his study with the evening paper before him. It called his eyes from a paragraph he was reading through a painful paragraph under heavy lids, on its front page.

This city has seldom seen so brilliant a gathering as that witnessed, late this afternoon, at the residence of the groom, the marriage of Mr. and Mrs. David Stires. The ceremony was performed by the Rev. Henry Jackson, rector of St. James.

The groom is the son of one of our leading citizens, and the beauty and talent of the bride have long made her noted. The happy couple, accompanied by the groom's father and mother, were leaving with them the congratulations and good wishes of the entire community.

The countess, who was wedding will be given in tomorrow morning's issue.

## CHAPTER IX.

After a Year.

Night had fallen. The busy racket of wheels and traffic was still, the pavements with electric lights and windows were open, and crowds jostled to and fro on the cool pavements. But Harry Sanderson, as he walked slowly backward from a long ramble in knickerbockers and Norfolk jacket, was not thinking of the sights and sounds of the pleasant evening. He had tramped miles since sundown, and had returned as he set out, gloomy, unrequited, and feeling himself baffled. Even the dog at his heels seemed to partake of his master's mood; he padded along soberly, forging ahead now and again to look up inquiringly at the protracted countess.

Set back from the street in a wide estate of trees and shrubbery, stood a great white-porched house that gloomed darkly from amid its aspens. Not a light had twinkled from it for nearly a year. The little old house had grown in different. The secret of that prolonged honeymoon, that dearth and absence, Harry Sanderson and the bishop could have figured. For the bishop knew of Hugh's criminal act; he was named executor of the will that lay in the Korean chest, and him David Stires had written the truth. His heart had been torn with pity for Jessica, and understanding. The secret he locked in his own breast, as did Harry Sanderson, each thinking the other ignorant of it.

Since that wedding day no shred of peace had come to either. Harry had wished for none. To think of Jessica was a recurrent pang, and yet the very combination of the safe in his study he had formed of the letters of her name. In each memory of her he felt the love which he must deny.

Until their meeting his moral existence had been strangely without struggle. When at a single blow he had cut away, and henceforth, from his old life, he had left behind him his vices and temptations. That life had been, as he himself had dimly realized at the time, a phase, not a quality, of his development. It had known no profound emotions. The first deep feeling of his experience had come with that college catastrophe which had brought the abrupt change to all his habits of living. He did not know that the impulse which would drive him to the church was the gravitational force of an austere ancestry, itself an inheritance from a long line of sectarian progenitors—an Archbishop of Canterbury among them, the great, the great, the great, when King George had been first Sanderson, a virile, sports-loving churchman, to the tobacco emoluments of the Old Dominion. He did not know that his nature was swinging back along the old groove in obedience to the subtle call of blood.

In his new life, problems were already solved for him. He had only to drift with the current, and the current, whereon was smooth sailing. And so he had drifted till that evening when "Satan Sanderson," dead and done and buried, had risen in his grave-clothes to mock him in the person of Hugh. Each hour since then had sensitized him, had put him through exercises of self-control. And then, with that kiss of Jessica's, had come the sudden illumination that had made him curse the work of his hands—that had shown him what had dawned for him, too late!

Outcast and criminal as he was, cast away, who had stolen a bank's money and a woman's love, Hugh was still her husband. Hugh's wife—what could she be to him? And this fevered conflict was shot through with yet another pang; for the waking smart of compunction which had risen at Jessica's bitter cry, "You helped to make him what he has become!" would not down. That cry had shown him, in one clarifying instant, the follies and delinquencies of his early career, reduplicated in the polarized light of conscience, Hugh—loafer, gambler and thief—stood as the type and sign of an enduring accusation.

But if the recollection of that wedding day and its aftermath stalked along with him—if that kiss had seemed to cling again and again to his lips as he sat in the quiet of his study—no one guessed. He seldom played his violin now, but he had shown no outward sign. As time went on, he had become no less brilliant, though more inscrutable, but less popular, save perhaps to the parish heretofore hunter for whom he had never cared a straw. But beneath the surface a great change had come to Harry Sanderson.

Judge Cowell drove by in his dog-cart, with the superintendent of the long, low hospital. The man of briefs looked keenly at the handsome face on the pavement. "Seems the worse for wear," he remarked sentimentally. The surgeon nodded wisely. "That's the trouble with most of you professional people," he said; "you think

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too much!" The judge clucked to his mare and drove on at a smart trot.

The friendly, critical eye clove to the fact; it discerned the mental state of which gloom, depression and insomnia were but the physical regents. Harry had lately felt disquieting symptoms of strain—irritable weakness, fitful repose, a sense of vague, mysterious meagerness in a strange language never before heard. He had found that the long walks no longer brought the old reaction—that even the swift rush of his motor car, as it bore him through the dusk of an evening, gave him little more than a momentary relief. Tomorrow he had planned a month's pedestrian outing through the wide ranch valleys and the further ranges, and this should set him up again.

Now, however, as he walked along, he was bitterly absorbed in thoughts other than his own needs. He passed more than one acquaintance with a stare of non-recognition. One of these was the bishop, who turned an instant to look after him. The bishop had seen that look frequently of late, and had wondered if it betokened physical illness or mental unrest. More than once he had remembered with a sigh the old whisper of Harry Sanderson's early weakness. But he knew youth and its law, and he liked and respected him. Only two days before, on the second anniversary of Harry's ordination, he had given him for his sinner's guard a little gold cross engraved with his name and containing the date. The bishop had seen his gift sparkling against Harry's waistcoat as he passed. He walked on with a puzzled frown.

The bishop was pensive and prosy, conventional and somewhat stereotyped in ideas, but he was full of the milk of human kindness. Now he promised himself that when the hour's errand on which he was hastening was done he would stop at the study and if he found Harry in, would have a quiet chat with him. Perhaps he could put his finger on the trouble.

At a crossing the sight of a knot of people on the opposite side of the street awoke Harry from his abstraction. They had gathered around a peripatetic street preacher, who was holding forth in a shrill voice. Beside him, on a short pole, hung a dripping gasoline flare, and the burning flame lit his bare head, his thin features, his long hair and his bony hands moving in vehement gestures. A small mole on his forehead stood beside him, and on his front was painted in glaring white letters:

"Hallelujah Jones."

"Suffer me that I may speak; and after that I have spoken, mock on." Job, xxi, 3.

From over the way Harry gazed at the tall, stooped, pitilessly, pitilessly, a thin, alpine, coat, at the ascetic face burned a brick-red from exposure to wind and sun, at the flashing eyes, the impassioned earnestness. He paused, the hand and listened curiously, for Hallelujah Jones, with his evangelism mingled a spice of the rancor of the socialist. In his thinking, the rich and the wicked were mingled inextricably in the great chastisement. He was preaching now from his favorite text: "Woe to them that are at ease in Zion!"

Harry smiled grimly. He had always been at ease in Zion. He wore sumptuous clothes, the ruby in his ring would bring what this plodding porter would call a fortune. At this moment, Hede, his dapper Finn chauffeur, was polishing the motor car for him to take him to the opera. That very afternoon he had put into the little safe in the chapel study two thousand dollars in gold which he had drawn, a part for his charities and quarterly payments and a part to take with him for the exigencies of his trip. The street evangelist over there, preaching paradise and perdition to the grinning yokels, often needed a square meal, and was lucky if he always knew where he would sleep. Yet did the Reverend Harry Sanderson, after all, get more out of life than Hallelujah Jones?

The thread of his thought broke. The bareheaded figure had ended his harangue. The eternal fires were banished for a time, while, seated on a camp stool at his crazy molestation, he proceeded to transport his audience to the heavenly meads of the New Jerusalem. He began a "gospel song" that everybody knew:

"I saw a wayward traveler,  
The sun was bending low,  
He overtopped the mountain  
And reached the foot below.  
He saw the Golden City,  
His everlasting home,  
And shouted as he journeyed,  
'Deliverance will come!'"

"Palms of Victory,  
Crowns of Glory,  
I shall wear!"  
The voice was weather cracked, and

the canvas bellows of the instrument coughed and wheezed, but the music was infectious, and half from overflowing spirits, and half from the mere swing of the melody, the crowd chanted the refrain:

"Palms of Victory,  
Crowns of Glory,  
I shall wear!"

Two, three verses of the old-fashioned hymn he sang, and after each verse more of the bystanders—some in real earnestness, some in impious hilarity—shouted in the chorus:

"Palms of Victory, I shall wear!"

Harry walked on in a brown study, the refrain ringing through his brain. There came to him the memory of Hugh's old snarl as he looked at his bookshelves—Nietzsche, and Pascal sat cheek by jowl with Theron Ware and Robert Elsmere—"I wonder how much of all that you really believe?" How much did he really believe? He used to read Thomas a Kempis then; he said to himself, "and Jonathan Edwards; now I read Renan and the Origins of Christian Mystical Philosophy."

At the chapel gate lounged his chauffeur, awaiting orders.

"Bring the car round, Hede," said Harry, "and I shall need you after that tonight. I'll drive her myself. You can meet me at the garage."

Hede, the dapper, good-looking Scandinavian, touched his glossy straw hat respectfully. It was a piece of luck that his master had not planned a motor trip instead of a four-afloat, for a month, after tonight, his time was his own. His quarter's wages were in his pocket and he slapped the wad with satisfaction as he sauntered off to the bowling alley.

The study was pitch-dark, and Rummy halted on the threshold with a low, ominous growl as Harry fumbled for the electric switch. As he found and pressed it and the place flooded with light, he saw a figure there—the figure of a man who had been sitting alone—beside the empty hearth, who rose, shrinking back from the sudden brilliancy. It was Hugh Stires.

(To be continued.)

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## THE HIGHWAYMAN BEHIND THE MASK.

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